

The  
**Brashear**  
Bulletin

The Newsletter of the Society of Private and Pioneer Numismatists

Summer 2008



# The Brasher Bulletin

Society of Private and Pioneer Numismatists

Summer 2008

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## Editor's Observations

Dear S.P.P.N. Member:

The long awaited summer edition of *The Brasher Bulletin* is finally here. You will notice that this edition is much sleeker than usual; we were short on article submissions over the last season, but we'll try to make up for it in the next issue. Now could not be a better time for you to make a contribution of an article, story, letter, photo, or other interesting piece to share with your fellow SPPNites!

However, what we lack in quantity is certainly made up for in quality. This issue starts off with a new column called "Pioneer Spotlight." This will be a regular feature in the *Bulletin* and will consist of a biography, or other true story about the life of a pioneer. The first installment tells the story of little known Charles Thompson Blake, a miner and assayer with Wells Fargo.

Next we take a peek into the contents of Victorian Shell Boxes, thanks to continuing contributor Dr. Robert Chandler. While Chandler compares the boxes to Beanie Babies, what they contain is much more interesting.

Another regular contributor, Fred Holabird, makes an appearance with the first of a two part series on the insights of the rarely acknowledged African American pioneer numismatists, in his story of the Treasure Hill ingot.

A step back into the daily life of a miner is experienced by reading the letters Charlie Black painstakingly transcribed. In these letters, we see the hard work, heartache and hope that prevailed in the Gold Rush community.

Our final article comes from Michael Wehner, who will become another regular contributor to the *Brasher*. This first installment tells the story of *The King of Western Exonumia*.

Last but not least is the announcement of our annual meeting on Saturday August 2, 2008 in Room #320 at the Baltimore Convention Center.

This may be one of the most important for us since we will be hosting the Pioneer Gold Forum. This group of elite numismatic experts have been selected to be part of a fact-finding and authentication effort to analyze controversial pioneer gold pieces. The Forum debuted at January 2008 FUN show in Orlando where they discussed the Prooflike 1861 \$20 Clark Gruber & Co. gold pieces. Many of these pieces had been sold in previous auctions over the last 50 years and some, including overstruck specimens, had been independently certified. The Forum determined that these pieces were 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fantasies! (See *Brasher Bulletin* Winter 2008 Issue).

This year the Forum will tackle the Prooflike and Proof 1853 U. S. ASSAY OFFICE \$20 GOLD PIECES. These pieces were the subject of a 1968 P.N.G. arbitration that decided to sidestep the issue of when and why the coins were made, i.e. were they contemporary, restrikes from original dies, or fantasies. The Forum plans to thoroughly discuss these issues. You should reserve your seats now. For more information or to answer any questions contact your editor at [Don@Kagins.com](mailto:Don@Kagins.com)

Enjoy!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Don".



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## Pioneer Spotlight Charles Thompson Blake

*Compiled by Lena DeMarco, Associate Editor*

Like thousands of others responding to the cries of GOLD, GOLD in the year 1849, Charles Thompson Blake boarded a ship at New York City bound for Nicaragua and the gold fields of California.

Born the eldest son of Eli W. Blake of New Haven, Conn. on Oct. 21, 1826, Thompson graduated from Yale University in 1847. Two years later he embarked on his journey to California with his friend Roger Baldwin. Their friends Edwin Tyler and Charles T.H. Palmer had preceeded them to California.

They arrived in San Juan de Nicaragua in late March, 1849 and spent four months crossing Central America. After securing passage in Realjo aboard the brig LAURA ANN, Blake and Baldwin sailed for California. Despite suffering shortages of water, rancid food and blistering heat, all aboard arrived safely in San Francisco 76 days after departing Realjo. Stopping briefly in San Francisco, Blake traveled to Sacramento, bought supplies and secured passage to the gold fields near Georgetown. There, he and his 3 companions established claims.

The company of Blake, Tyler, Baldwin and Palmer remained together for several years, combining their efforts and meager profits to buy and sell claims as each exhausted its worth. These included

both placer claims and coyote claims. During this period, Blake established himself in Michigan City, a small mining community east of Nevada City. Between 1852 and 1856, a severe drought struck California, and placer mining suffered. Blake and his partners realized that the future of mining in the Sierra would depend upon both capital and water. Thus in 1852, the company embarked upon a water project to bring water to the claims. They sold stock to raise capital, and dug 18 miles of ditches over the next five years.

But poor health plagued Blake on several occasions, and so in 1853, he took employment with

Wells Fargo Express Co. as an agent. His duties included assaying gold dust and handling routine banking matters. A popular local figure, he was encouraged to run for State Assembly more than once, though he continually declined. Blake remained employed with Wells Fargo

Express Co. for the next ten years in Michigan City, Yankee Jim's, Folsom, and in Oregon and Idaho Territory.

Despite his employment with Wells Fargo, Blake and his associates formed the Eldorado Water Company about 1854. The Eldorado Water Co. controlled virtually all of the water rights in the Michigan City area. Also during this period, Blake corresponded with his father in New Haven regarding the Blake Rock Crusher, an invention which aided in mining quartz and in building roads. *Continued on next page*



*This article is the first in a column new to the Brasher of biographies on our Nation's pioneers. Keep an eye out for more exciting true tales of this fascinating group of Americans.*

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*Continued from page 3*

In 1863, Blake went to Idaho working there on and off until 1871. He married Harriet Stiles, a long-time Connecticut acquaintance, in 1868. They lived, for a time in San Francisco, moving to Berkeley in 1887. They had several children, Anson Stiles (b. 1870), Eliza (b. 1872) and Edwin Tyler (b. 1875).

In 1873, Blake bought an interest in, and became secretary of a macadamizing company in Oakland, Ca. The Oakland Paving Company, which used the Blake Rock Crusher, was presided over by C.T.H. Palmer. Following Palmer's death in Feb. 1897, C.T. Blake became president until his death in December of that year.

*Courtesy, California Historical Society*



*Editor's Note: Unfortunately, there seems to be no connection between Charles Thompson Blake and the famous ingot maker Goreham Blake.*

**Calling all S.P.P.N. Members!**  
**We need your submissions!!!**  
**Please send articles, essays, photos, and stories**  
**to [lena@kagins.com](mailto:lena@kagins.com)**



## Victorian Shell Boxes: 1850's Beanie Babies

By Dr. Robert J. Chandler



The craze for Beanie Babies is not long past. Ty Warner introduced these small under stuffed animals filled with PVC pellets in 1993, and ultimately produced 50,000 different varieties. At the height of the madness from 1996 through 1999, some of these creative beanbags sold for thousands of dollars.

Comparable in decorative value and as useless curiosities are Victorian metal shell boxes around an inch in diameter, filled with tiny medals. The British maker had one for the California market, and an

example of a box, perhaps once filled with "Model" Fractionals, is a minor miner treasure in Ron Gillio's collection.

In England, makers turned out shell boxes in brass or white metal replicating an 1850 shilling, half crown, and 1852 penny. Others of these toy boxes commemorated the battle of Waterloo, Windsor Castle, Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. Inside were tiny metallic busts of the royal family, the Duke of Wellington, and other personalities.

Gillio's example is brass, 15/16<sup>th</sup> of an inch, or 23 millimeters in diameter and 3mm thick. On obverse is the caption, "Immigration to California," showing an Eastern seaport. On the reverse is the caption "California 1849." Making it a miner treasure, are three gold seekers, one digging, one panning, and the third hoeing. The hoe is a tool not heretofore known to California mining and thereby hints at the English origin of the box. Two distinct dies vary by having one having the "1" of the date higher.

All authorities I consulted averred that these boxes once contained miniature coins rather than say, printed slips of paper advertising "Ron Gillio's Fast Clipper Ship Line to California." The four varieties of "Model Coins" are crude and not particularly well designed.

Perhaps they were forerunner of the pickup line when a young man asked a winsome lass to "come up





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For the exceedingly rare Fractionals, the makers moved the 1849 date to the obverse under the eagle. Reverse wreaths on the California Model Dollar and California Model Half Dollar resembled those on gold California pieces made by French jewelers in San Francisco. The Model ¼ Dollar, being so tiny, was without ornamentation. These three, all being gold plated copper, resembled their genuine counterparts. Furthermore, the \$1, 50-cent, and 25-cent Model Coins were within a millimeter of the genuine California coins.

#### *Credits:*

*Half eagle, Robert J. Chandler*

*\$1, 50 cents, 25 cents, Ron Lerch, Sacramento*



Denomination:	U.S. Gold Coin	Model Coin
\$5	21mm [1/4 Eagle is 17mm]	17.5mm [11/16in]

\$1	13mm 1849-1854	12.5mm
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#### **Privately-Minted California Round Gold Coins**

\$1	13.5mm	12.5mm
½ D	11.5mm	10.5mm
¼ D	9.5mm	8.5mm

By design and size, it appears San Francisco's private minters influenced toy design a half hemisphere away.



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## PIONEER GOLD FORUM TO DISCUSS CONTROVERSIAL U.S. ASSAY OFFICE 1853 \$20s AT ANA'S WORLD FAIR OF MONEY

This year's annual meeting at the ANA will consist of a special gathering of the Pioneer Gold Forum, to discuss the controversial proof and prooflike 1853 \$20 U.S. Assay Office of Gold Pieces. These pieces were the subject of an inconclusive 1968 PNG arbitration.

The Pioneer Gold Forum is an elite group of numismatic experts in the field of pioneer gold and have been carefully chosen for their abilities, willingness and impartiality towards analyzing controversial pioneer numismatic issues. Earlier this year, the Forum analyzed and concluded that the "Prooflike" 1861 Clark, Gruber & Co. \$20s were 20<sup>th</sup> century fantasies, leading to PCGS' subsequent repurchase -- and relabeling as fantasies -- of erroneously certified overstruck specimens. This year's meeting takes place Saturday August 2, 2008 in Room #320 at the Baltimore Convention Center.



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## African-American Miners and the Treasure Hill Silver Ingot, 1869

### *A Silver Ingot Opens a New Chapter of American History*

By Fred N. Holabird

*Part One of a Two Part Series*

#### Introduction

Money is a tool of commerce. It is less known as a tool of communication. Treasures of our past are discovered when numismatic items communicate their history. In some cases, that history is so important, it causes new chapters of history to be written. In that sense, this story will create a new book, involving a segment of western history completely lost until a small, engraved silver ingot was discovered in Maryland recently.<sup>1</sup>

#### Western Trade

The method of trade in the west historically was precious metals. The discovery of massive amounts of gold and silver created mining rushes not seen before in the world – first in California for its gold(1850's), then in Nevada for its gold and silver(1860's). As thousands of people from around the world came to the western mining regions, the need for money easily surpassed demand. Miners and mining camp merchants were

creative. They traded in gold dust. They made their own pioneer gold coins. They poured ingots from the metals extracted from mines. All of these forms



of money regularly traded at banks and the branch mints. Nevada discoveries resulted in silver and gold production at unprecedented rates. The Comstock proved to be the largest single mining district yet discovered in the world. With that success, the rush was on

to find another region that would be as productive. One of the first subsequent discoveries was at Treasure Hill in 1868, known as the "Rush to White Pine" because of its location in remote White Pine County on Nevada's eastern frontier.

Mining on the western frontier was tough, hard work. Those that could survive were respected. Skin color was not the segregationist's tool, it was the ability to mine gold and silver that mattered most. Those that couldn't were naturally shunned from the communities and sent packing.

#### The Men

The silver ingot is a presentation ingot be-



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tween two men, Robert Small and William Saunders. Robert H. Small and William Saunders were free-born African-Americans born in Maryland in 1833 and 1836. Small, a relative political activist, took part in the later stages of the California gold rush and mined silver at Treasure Hill in 1869. Saunders became an important lawyer in Baltimore.

## Political Setting

Throughout history, the single-most useful way to control humanity was through fear and slavery. Fear was created by war with its associated death toll and seizing of property. Slavery has been

known for the entire history of mankind, certainly for more than 5000 years. With these human controls comes one striking constant result—without education there can

be no intellectual advancement. Without free thought, there can be no forward progress. In this manner, slavery held back the very things that makes humans special – our ability to use experimentation, logic and reason to improve upon the past and therefore improve the way of life. The free thinkers became the doers – the inventors – the intellectuals.

Robert Small and William Saunders had a

strikingly different upbringing than most African-Americans. Born as free blacks during the early 1800's, they had opportunities never or rarely offered to slaves. They were born into a society destined for great change, but no one knew it. Small and Saunders were educated. Their colored brethren were rarely educated, still held within the ranks of slavery. This gave them opportunities afforded few blacks, at a time when human intellectual thought was still in a period of rebirth. They were born at a time of invention and a time of development. Not only were trains a new and remarkable means of transportation, but the very thought process behind new technologies such as

the science of mining geology were just being explored in Georgia and North Carolina only a couple of decades after the first geologic map was produced in the world.



THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT.  
CELEBRATED MAY 9, 1870

## Small & Saunders

### Robert H. Small

The past of Robert H. Small is not easy to derive. He was probably the son of Robert H. Small of Philadelphia, a white man, and a servant girl. Born in Maryland in late 1833 or early 1834, he was listed as a Mulatto in all of the census records during his lifetime.<sup>2</sup> About 1858, Small married.<sup>3</sup>

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Robert and Harriett D. Small began a large family of five children in 1859 in Philadelphia with the birth of their first child, Ernest A. Small. With the onset of the Civil War which exacerbated racial issues, the new family was probably intrigued by the California gold rush and the rich new discoveries in Nevada Territory, and headed west about 1860-1861. Some historical evidence suggests they settled in the goldfields south of Sacramento, possibly in Shingle Springs near Placerville. While in California, Small worked as a barber, and the family quickly grew with the births of Robert H Small, Jr. in 1862 and Catherine (Katie) B. Small in 1866.

Harriett went back to Pennsylvania briefly in 1868 to have her fourth child, Eugene D. Small. Robert remained in Shingle Springs, but when the news of the Rush to White Pine in the mountains of remote eastern Nevada was first published the newspapers of California, Small was off to Treasure Hill and Hamilton in February, 1869 along with thousands of others to seek his fortune.

Robert had become a vocal part of the African-American community by then. The source of his trip to Treasure Hill was an article in the *Elevator*, a radical newspaper.

## William U. Saunders

William U. Saunders was born in Baltimore Maryland in 1836, and like Small, to parents of mixed racial origin. He married Sarah, ten years his junior, in about 1862. The couple had seven children.<sup>4</sup> In September, 1863, Saunders enlisted in the Army. He was a Corporal and a Quarter Master Sergeant in the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Infantry, discharged November 16, 1866.<sup>5</sup> A year later, the Republican National Committee sent him to Florida, where he helped create the Florida Republican Party as a member of the "Radical Mule Team", and became President of the Florida Union League. His political activity led him to the 1868 Florida Constitutional Convention. That year he ran for Congress as an Independent. Unsuccessful, he returned to Baltimore where he worked for the Post Office as an inspector, which required a lot of de-

TECTIVE work. He studied law, became a lawyer, and in 1869 became active with the Ratification movement associated with the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> amendments. He was chief Marshal for the Ratification Parade in Baltimore just after the completion of the Colored National Labor Union meeting. Saunders and others began working toward the ratification of the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment by forming a national union to draw attention to their cause of total racial equity in business, life and politics. In 1872 he opened a law office in Alachua County with Josiah Walls (a Congressman) and Henry Harmon. While there he became a customs official as well as a US Marshal.<sup>6</sup>

Small and Saunders probably met in Baltimore while young. Their friendship lasted decades, and in 1869 it resulted in the pair's mutual cooperation at the first Colored National Labor Convention.

## Small in California

Robert Small may have heard of African-American mining exploits in California in places such as Shingle Springs, located in El Dorado County, about nine miles southwest of Placerville where gold was a plenty.

Shingle Springs was an important center for gold placer mining, once reporting \$100 for every rocker full of dirt. Nearby was Negro Hill, a mining camp started by Mormons in 1848. In 1849, a group of African-Americans led by a man named Kelsey struck rich ground that paid the team of five men three hundred dollars a day. Soon a store and boarding house went up and more prospectors, including Chinese, swarmed the hills.<sup>7</sup> Racial troubles may have set in by the mid 1850's, with claim jumping fights over ownership of gold properties, an age-old battle.

Small became a resident of Shingle Springs. Little is known of his occupation, or the exact year he moved west. Certainly this is gold country, and Small undoubtedly was a prospector,



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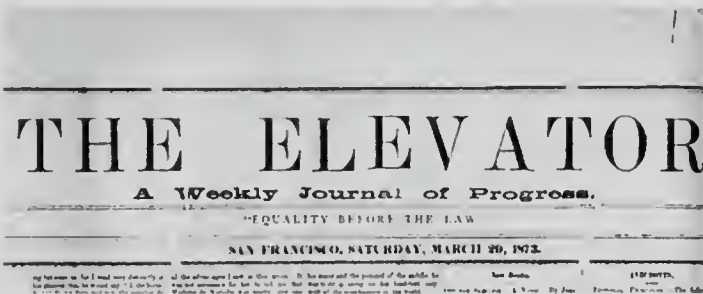
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but may have moonlighted as a community barber as well.<sup>8</sup> Here he became a steady reader of San Francisco's *Elevator* newspaper, one of two western newspapers published by African-Americans in the 1860's.

## The Elevator

Phillip Anderson, a Philadelphian, had become a vocal leader of the African-American community in San Francisco during the 1850's and 1860's. He was involved with California's first African-American newspaper, *Mirror of the Times*, and began the publication of the *Pacific Appeal* in 1862 after the failure of the *Mirror*. His partnership with Phillip Alexander Bell in the *Appeal* "collapsed"



shortly after, according to Leigh Johnson, in her article "Equal Rights and the Heathen Chinese: Black Activism in San Francisco, 1865-1875."<sup>9</sup> Bell thereafter began a more radical publication, *The Elevator*. "Bell's *Elevator* espoused direct, vigorous agitation; but Anderson's *Appeal* preferred to work through elected lawmakers," wrote Johnson.

Bell's *Elevator* had become a voice to many African-Americans in the mother lode region, and Small was one of the listeners. In this regard, Small was in contact with Bell, and the *Elevator* later reported his departure from Shingle Springs to Treasure Hill in February, 1869.<sup>10</sup> Bell, and thus *The Elevator*, remained very interested in Treasure Hill, and reported a number of African-Americans working in the mines and mining camps in the White Pine district. In fact, while warning men not to come to White Pine until spring, many, such as Small, ignored the warnings and braved the harsh desert winter of the eastern mining frontier, as

noted by Elmer Rusco in *Good Time Coming; Black Nevadans in the Nineteenth Century* (1975). Reports of great richness permeated western society, which was colorless. The *Elevator* reported: "A young friend of ours has shown indications of having the fever in its incipient stage. His case is not altogether hopeless, but we fear he has White Pine on the brain too far for recovery."<sup>11</sup>

## Activism and Mining

The *Elevator*, which promoted activism, was one of the most important forms of communication to the African-American community. It was overlooked by the regular newspapers, and rarely quoted, unlike newspapers from the interior mining regions. The regular newspapers were quoted in mining publications regularly, such as in the *Mining and Scientific Press*. But to get quoted, the newspaper has to be distributed to a wider audience, and the editors of the *Elevator* probably failed

## THE ELEVATOR

SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 1873.

A Weekly Journal of Progress,  
PUBLISHED EVERY SATURDAY BY  
**PHILIP A. BELL.**  
Office—No. 616 Battery Street, bet. Jackson  
and Pacific.

to recognize that their voice could be heard in the mining press. (Continued on next page)



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## The Setting for the Rush to White Pine; Treasure Hill and Hamilton

The late 1860's were a time of rebuilding, for all Americans and African-Americans in particular. The Civil War was over. It had its toll on Americans everywhere, even the west coast mining regions. It was a time of the passage of three important Constitutional Amendments, the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments which were freedom, the right of citizenship and the right to vote for all African-Americans. Three basic important rights taken for granted by most Anglo Americans. Small played a great part in all of these matters. His interest in mining at Treasure Hill was aroused by story after story in the *Elevator* about rich silver discoveries at White Pine in late 1868. Many of his fellow African-American men had run off to White Pine to seek fortunes, and even began forming their own mining companies, such as the Elevator Mining Company, formed in 1869.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The ingot weighs 3.15 Troy ounces, and measures about 1" x 2" x 0.5". Three small holes were drilled, one on the back, and one on each end for what appears to have been an elevated mount position, possibly for a glass case.

<sup>2</sup>The lone exception is the Nevada Census of 1870, in which the current internet records incorrectly transcribed the official US Census, and show him as white.

<sup>3</sup>The historical record is obscured by the presence of at least three different Robert H. Smalls born in Maryland or Philadelphia over the same approximate decade.

<sup>4</sup>He had seven children according to census data, Sarah born 1863, Magdalin born 1865, Mary born 1868, Adelaide born 1870, Cora born 1872, Barauchia born 1877 and Joseph, born 1873. Saunders died sometime before 1900. His wife Sarah had remarried by then to Thomas Shorter, nearly twenty years her senior.

<sup>5</sup>Maryland Soldiers in the Civil War Vol. 2 web site.

<sup>6</sup>Graham, LeRoy; Baltimore, *The Nineteenth Century Black Capital*; University Press of America; 1982; pp206-224. Also Foner, Eric; *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction*; LSU Press; 1996; pp189-190. Mr. Randy Lieberman kindly helped with the research on Saunders.

<sup>7</sup>Sioli; *History of El Dorado County*; 1883; p199-201. Also Gudde; *California Gold Camps*; 1975, p317.

<sup>8</sup>The only mention of any Small surname in Paolo Sioli's *History of El Dorado County* is for Small's (station) on the road to the Alpine mining districts near the summit, 64.05 miles from Placerville.)

<sup>9</sup>The *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January, 1980, pp57-68. Purchased at a fee with internet download, a great service.

<sup>10</sup>*Elevator*, 2/5/1869

<sup>11</sup>Rusco, p148.

<sup>12</sup>Johnson, Leigh; "Equal Rights and the Heathen Chinese: Black Activism in San Francisco, 1865-1875" in the *Western Historical Quarterly*, v11, No.1, January, 1980, pp57-68. Rusco, p149.



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## Michigan Bluff, Placer County, California

*Compiled By Lena DeMarco, Associate Editor*

This flourishing mining town is situated in latitude 39°, among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, or as the words signify in English, the Snowy Saw Mountains. It is built on the top of a hill, at the bottom of which, some two miles distant, runs the North Fork of the Middle Fork of the American river, or of the Rio de Los Americanos, as it was called by the Mexicans.

It is situated at an altitude of nearly 4,000 feet above the level of the sea. The climate for the greater portion of the year cannot be excelled for its beauty and salubrity.

The atmosphere is cool, bracing and exhilarating. No noxious gases are wafted upon its wings. No invisible poisonous malaria forms a part of its composition.

Innumerable springs of water flow from our mountain sides, clear as crystal and cold as the banks of snow from which it was formed. It is generally impregnated with iron, which gives it an agreeable taste and tonic properties which the water of the valleys does not possess.

In summer the days are very warm, the thermometer frequently rises as high as 100° in the shade, and in low situations it has occasionally reached 120° in the shade, yet the nights, fanned by gentle freezes from the snow-clad Sierras, are always cool and refreshing.

The sky, for eight months of the year, is clear and serene. No dark clouds obstruct the rays of the sun by day, nor of the moon by night. This is the appearance during (the dry season. But when the wet season arrives, what a change! Then winter sometimes pounces upon us suddenly like the eagle upon its prey. Then our mountain forests present

the appearance represented by pictures of the high latitudes. The forest trees are principally ever-greens; the damp snow adheres to their branches in large quantities, causing them to droop and point downwards toward the earth, as if attracted by the snowy carpet which covers the ground and everything upon it to the depth of several feet.

A sight of this scene, especially when the large feathery snowflakes are falling thickly all around, is indeed the most dreary and the most sublime which I ever witnessed. And while this dreary aspect is exhibited on our mountains, it is remarkable that by going a distance of four or five miles, to the valleys of some of our deep canons, you will find a summer climate, where the ground is bare, and mules and other animals live and fatten upon the growing vegetation.



To breathe our mountain air, free from fogs, from clouds and from malaria, to drink our pure water, distilled by the hand of Nature from banks of snow in the mountain tops, and distributed to us in sparkling rivulets, which flow from their sides to ride over our hill tops and gaze upon the beautiful scenery, which Nature in her wildest mood has painted, in the most romantic colors, is an enjoyment which would well repay our friends below who live in the smoky, dusty, impure, foggy atmosphere of the cities, for making our mountains a visit. (Cont'd on p. 16)



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## **Specialists in:**

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Two years have elapsed since the above sketch was penned. Mule loads of gold have been taken from our gulches, placers and hills. Water is now brought into our town for mining purposes from thirty miles distance further up in the mountains. Wheelbarrows for removing rocks, and sledges for breaking them have given way to derricks; some of which are propelled by water power. Wrought iron pipes are superseding flumes. Improved methods of saving gold have been discovered. Mountains

have been leveled, the glittering treasure precipitated and the alluvion sent to Sacramento, to be deposited in bars, or to reclaim tule lands, according to circumstances. Ground which a few years ago was not worth working, is now, in consequence of improvements in mining, very valuable. But like all Californians, we have had our drawbacks. In July, 1857, a devastating fire swept over the whole town like a mighty wind, and almost as rapidly, destroying the labor of years in a single hour. The town was rebuilt on the same site, but the tunnels which everywhere run under the streets and houses, together with the rapid removal of the earth around it by the miner in search of gold, with the water which flows through a score or more hydraulics, has been rapidly undermining its foundation, and causing the ground upon which it was built to slide, thus compelling its removal to another site. A new site has been selected and most of the business houses removed to it, and new ones erected thereon, while fully 80 acres of land, including the old site, is, Cottonocracy like, in a state of active secession, intent on dissolving the Union. The night previous to the present day (March 28th) was a sleepless one with many of our inhabitants. The whole secession district moved about two feet during the night, and what made it



INSCRIPTION READS: BIGGUN MINE MICHIGAN BLUFF 1880

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worse was, that some portions of it, South Carolina like, moved faster than the rest. Timbers cracked over people's heads like South Carolina rifles, causing many fears, but hurting nobody. Sectional cracks run under many houses, causing one part to secede to the south, while the other remains with the north, thus seriously endangering the union.

But the foundation of the secession district is very unstable and good judges think it cannot hold together long. The superstructures erected thereon are tottering and falling, threatening to envelop the occupants in total ruin. Many of the inhabitants of the secession district are, like

Southern Yankees, moving northward where things are more stable.

But while secession movements are unsettling everything in the south, the "more perfect union" at the north stands firm. Two stone fireproof stores bid defiance to the devouring element. Two clothing stores provide for the wants of the outer man, while five provision stores make good provision for his interior, and provide him with mining implements and other necessary articles. Three hotels and two restaurants cater to the appetites of citizens and strangers, two expressmen and four barbers get a good living by shaving, two limbs of the law profit by the moral ills of man, and three disciples Esculapius relieve his physical ailments. Two bakers furnish the staff of life, and fourteen grog-sellers life itself. Five shoemakers, armed with hammer and lapstone, pegs, flax and bristles, labor industriously to produce a good understanding in the neighborhood. Two German tailors, grow fat upon cabbage, as Germans and tailors generally do.

Six sons of Vulcan smite at the anvil, do dirty work, and make clean money. One watchmaker teaches how to go upon tick, an art the people are

not slow to learn. Five billiard and gaming saloons furnish recreation, and some of them show green-horns that "here's the place to get your money back." Two livery stables contain fast horses for the use of fast men. Two tinmen make tin ware for the tin and sell hardware for hard money. Two drug-

gists sell pukes and physics, paints and perfumes; also sarsaparilla which cures all the diseases flesh is heir to, except coughs, colds and consumption, and they are abundantly provided for with their



LELAND STANFORD'S STORE MICHIGAN BLUFF CALIFORNIA

Cherry Pectoral. Over 40 Free Masons scribe their acts by the compass and measure them with the square. More than 60 Odd Fellows teach the duty of relieving the distressed, visiting the sick, burying the dead, comforting the afflicted, assisting the widow, and educating the orphan. Over 100 Sons of Temperance, under the banner of Love, Purity and Fidelity, are loud in their praises of cold water, and severe in their denunciation of grog. One Methodist preacher expounds the gospel to an average congregation of about 50 persons, and administers the emblems of the Savior's, body and blood to about 20 communicants. One school-teacher labors assiduously to teach the young ideas of 40 or 50 scholars how to shoot. One musician tries equally hard to teach how to sing. Two justices gravely explain what is the law, and one sheriff and. two constables attend to its execution. The hammer of the auctioneer strikes one, two, three everything is going, going.



## CALL FOR ASSISTANCE FOR 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION OF PRIVATE GOLD COINS AND PATTERNS OF THE UNITED STATES

Donald Kagin is asking for any assistance in updating his reference work, Private Gold Coins and Patterns of the United States. "It has been 30 years since I assembled my work on the first edition. Since then there have been new revelations and information about some of the various pioneer coins. In addition a number of new specimens have been discovered. It's time for a new edition," explained Kagin.

Besides new information, over the years pioneer enthusiasts have made suggestions for changes that will enhance the work. Some include a modified numbering system differentiating regular gold issues from patterns and other issues, inclusion of sub numbers for varieties, pedigrees for plate coins, etc. Anyone wishing to give input will be appreciated and credited.

The new edition will feature color plate coins as much as possible, updated population figures, an additional chapter on the S.S. Central America pioneer treasure, and new discoveries.



Please email or send your suggestions to:

*Donald Kagin*  
98 Main St. #201  
Tiburon CA 94920  
*don@kagins.com*

### BRASHER BULLETIN

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## ***Letters from the California Mines***

### **The California Gold Rush as described by the miners**

*By Charlie Black, S.P.P.N. Life Member*

Following the “official” discovery of gold in California by James W. Marshall at Sutter’s Mill on the American River on January 24, 1848, there was a significant migration of people to California “seeking the Elephant”. The prospective miners from Asia-Pacific, Central and South America, Europe, and the “States” had several traits in common. In general, they were a very adventuresome lot, leaving family and friends behind to seek their fortune in remote California. After arriving in California and toiling under harsh conditions for weeks, months, and years, most of these adventurers were not rewarded with fame or fortune. Many soon became lonely and homesick and most were desperate for news from “home” from family and friends left behind.

As confirmed by the following two letters from Auburn, California and Foxes (or Fox) Ravine, California, the mail from home that the prospective miners were desperately seeking took three to seven months to arrive in California even as late as 1852 and 1853. Nevertheless, news from the States was always welcome.

The “translations” of the full text of the two letters are attached for your reading pleasure. Copies of the letters may be requested through the Editor of *The Brasher Bulletin*.

On a personal note, if anyone is familiar with the location of Foxes (or Fox) Ravine, California, I would appreciate receiving information about it. Per the attached letter, it is thirty miles from Sacramento and five miles from [L. or S.] Bar.

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*Fox. Ravine. Cal. Nov 11/52*

*My. Dear. Parents*

*Eight long weeks since I have had any tidings from you and not knowing why I am writing this to see if I cannot find out*

*I do not blame you for not writen for I think that is not the case I do think you have been punctual avoiding to promis or I should not be writing this, at present I am in Foxes Ravine a mining or at least am going to as soon as we get rain my self and thre more are camping here at present this place is thirty miles from Sacramento and five miles from O. L. or S. Bar we have been doing a litle but not much got the prospect now is that we can make a living if nuthing mor as soon as we get rain, I have not much to write until I get something from home and as soon as you get this answer it and becareful to adress J.H. ? Sac City*

*From The Wandering Jim*



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*Autumn Placer Co. 1<sup>st</sup> Apl/53*

*My Dear Father*

*Last night I received  
Your letter of the 18<sup>th</sup> of January nearly  
three months after it was written.  
And about two week ago I received one  
letter from Sister & one from Charles  
dated 20<sup>th</sup> of Sept. 152 over seven months  
after they were written I think if my  
letters were directed to this place I  
should get them sooner. instead of  
directing them to the care of Mr. Bur-  
ton of Sac. City for I have not seen him  
since Novr. 150 and I do not think that  
he knows where I am. and where ever I  
am located I can allways get my letters  
from this place I was very glad to hear  
from you and to learn that you were all  
well*

*I am still at my same old busi-  
ness and am allin-ded with the same  
misfortune that I have heretofore  
met with in mining. and I do think  
that it is the poorst business in this  
Country but still there is something ex-*





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citing about it. a man always  
lives in hopes of Striking on something  
that will pay him well for his labour.

At present I am engaged in an  
operation of Drifting under a hill or  
Mountain and it will be four or five  
weeks before I can ascertain whether I  
will get anything for my labour or  
not. But to judge from what miners  
say and from what two men that have  
succeeded in getting in the hill I  
think that it will pay well. But if  
that fails it will be the last operation  
that I will ever engage in the mines.  
I will then go to Sac. City or San  
Francisco and find some employment or  
return to the States. I have been for-  
tunate enough since I have been in this  
Country to keep out of debt and that is  
all I can say I do not believe that that  
one miner out of ten makes more than  
enough in a year to pay for his board

Mr. Jackson that you spoke of in  
your letter went in the Express busi-  
ness about twelve months ago as an  
Agent for the firm of Wells  
Fargo & Co. in this place and I think



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that he has made money very fast. but as for myself I remained in the mines because I thought it was the best business to pursue but I have seen my mistake.

I received a letter from sister dated 7<sup>th</sup> the 26<sup>th</sup> of Novr. 1852 on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Feby. last and I answered it immediately. In which she in-Formed me of the Death of Aunt Marianna Bolling. And that I would received \$800 from her estate. I wish you would take my



part of the money and put it to what end use you may think best for your own benefit as I am young yet and think by perseverance that can make a comfortable living yet.

Young Green that came out on the Glenmore. I

heard from him a short time ago and he has made nothing since he has been in this Country he has been mining. Tell Bro Richard that I am much oblige to him for his sending me Petersburg Papers and that I send him two papers from this place.

Give my love to Sister and all. You shall here from me again soon

I Remain Your

Affect. Son

E. A. Batte



## The King of Western Exonumia

By Michael Welner

The organization of the Second Committee of Vigilance in San Francisco during the spring of 1856 was one of the most important political events to occur in Gold Rush California. Initially the committee was a reaction to the assassination of the maverick newspaperman James King of William by James Casey, a member of the San Francisco Board

Charles Cora, were summarily lynched by a mob of "Vigilantes" after a short show trial. Although these two executions were carried out quickly, the work of Second Committee of Vigilance was far from over. Corruption was endemic in the early San Francisco City government and James Casey was only one of many crooked politicians in 1856.



Obverse: BE JUST AND FEAR NOT / FIAT JUSTITIA RUAT CAELUM / (figure of justice) / V & G / SAN FRANCISCO / CALIFORNIA Reverse: ORGANIZED 9<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1851. REORGANIZED 14<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1856 / COMMITTEE OF VIGILANCE / (Watchful eye with rays)

Silver. Often looped for suspension. 36.9 mm diameter, 3.2 to 3.7 mm thick, 408 to 430 grains

of Supervisors. Numismatists remember King both as an early San Francisco banker and as the man responsible for discrediting certain private California gold coins. His murder was a response to King publishing a rather embarrassing, albeit true story that Casey had spent time in Sing Sing, the notorious New York prison. Casey and another killer,

By the time of the first executions, the Second Committee of Vigilance found itself in charge of a mob rule of the City. Having disposed of Casey, the organizers of the Second Committee of Vigilance were used their widespread popular support to threaten the rest of the City government to leave or clean up their act. Swelling to more than 6000



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members, the Committee was able to wrest control of the City government from the corrupted party machinery. By the fall of 1856, the Second Committee of Vigilance dissolved itself and transferred its power to the "People's Party", which eventually was absorbed into the Republican Party.

Much has been written about the events leading up to the reorganization of the Committee of Vigilance and its subsequent influence on political power in Gold Rush California. Eyewitness accounts by William T. Sherman and James O'Meara are particularly insightful as they were written by relatively objective outside observers rather than Committee members. The founders of the Second Committee of Vigilance were prominent members of the original 1851 Committee of Vigilance. One of these original members, William T. Coleman, who wrote the oath of fealty for the new committee, thought that members should be known by a number rather than by name, protecting their identity. Ornate silver badges were issued with a space for a number to be engraved. On the obverse an allegorical depiction of Justice is portrayed. Note that she is not wearing the traditional blindfold. On the reverse, this theme is continued with the ever-watchful eye of vigilance. The Latin phrase on the obverse translates to "Let justice be done, though the heavens fall". In this context, the phrase likely refers to a desire to rid the City of corruption, particularly at the highest levels.

William Coleman, member #1, had his badge made in gold. It currently resides in the National Numismatic Collection in the Smithsonian museum. According to the noted collector Joe Silva, between eighteen and twenty-one silver medals survive. About half of these have numbers engraved on them. Whether the blank ones were issued to members or are simply remainders is unknown. Few of the numbered badges have been traced to specific individuals. Many questions about these badges remain, no contemporary documentation specifically refers to them. Although some surviving

badges have four digit membership numbers (the highest being 5949), the survival rate seems suspiciously low if every one of the 6000 members had been issued one.

Sometimes referred to as the "King of Western US Exonumia", the medal is of a high quality manufacture. It is of a very high relief with machine doubling on some specimens indicating that multiple strikes were required to bring up the details<sup>1</sup>. The planchets appear to be cast and filed down rather than rolled<sup>1</sup>. The maker's mark, V&G, refers to A. Vachon and T. Giho who were located on Montgomery Street in San Francisco according to an early city directory. The die engraver is presently unknown but was likely in San Francisco at the time and highly skilled. *Continued on next page*



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*Continued from previous page*

Recently, an unnumbered specimen manufactured in tin or some other base white metal has surfaced out of an auction in France<sup>2</sup>. There is some debate about whether it is struck or cast. If struck, it would appear to have been made from old dies as it seems to have a major die crack and evidence of die rust. The suspension loop is soldered on and is consistent with that used on the silver badges. Regardless, the badge is not of recent manufacture. What was the purpose of this base metal badge? Could it have been made at a later date for some sort of reunion<sup>3</sup>? Or were cheaper badges made for Committee members of more modest means? <sup>1</sup> Pointed out by Joe Silva

<sup>2</sup> Stack's reports that a white metal badge was sold in a January 1992 auction of the Presidential Coin and Antique Co.

<sup>3</sup> Suggested by Ron Lerch

## Sources

Dwight L. Clarke, *William Tecumseh Sherman: Gold Rush Banker*. San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1969.

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San Francisco: James H. Barry, Publisher, No. 429 Montgomery Street 1887

<http://www.books-about-california.com>.

The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist1/vigil56.html>.





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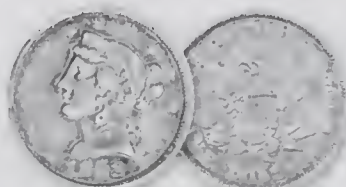
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1830 Templeton Reid \$2.50  
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Struck on \$10 planchet stock.  
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AU-50 (PCGS)



1849 Massachusetts &  
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Silver. K-2a.  
AU-50 (PCGS)



Rare Moran & Clark \$10 Pattern  
in Copper. K-1. EF-45



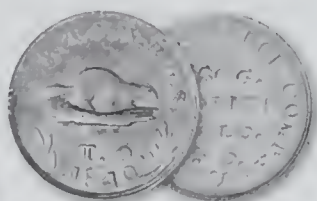
Miners Bank \$10 Gold. K-1.  
AU-50 (PCGS)



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Pattern in Silver. K-2.  
AU-55 (PCGS)



1849 Dubosq \$2.50  
Pattern in Copper. K-1.  
MS-62 (PCGS). The  
Kagin Plate Coin



1849 Oregon Exchange  
company \$5 Gold. K-1.  
EF-40 (NGC)



1849 Mormon  
\$2.50. K-1. AU-55  
(PCGS)



1851 Shultz & Company \$5  
Gold. K-1. AU-53 (PCGS).  
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Company \$10 Gold. K-3.  
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